



RISING POWERS INITIATIVE POLICY ALERT

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China's New Air Defense Zone Triggers Flurry of Activity from Asia Powers

On November 23, China announced the establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over disputed parts of the East China Sea and declared that it would scramble "emergency defense responses" to aircraft that entered the zone without first informing China. Several countries in the region expressed immediate outrage, and the ADIZ became a [major topic](#) during Vice President Joseph Biden's [three-leg tour to Asia](#).

As tensions heat up, this Policy Alert examines the reactions of China, Japan, South Korea, and India to these emerging developments.

CHINA

Chinese editorials uniformly supported establishment of the ADIZ as "defensive" in nature while simultaneously lambasting Japan and the United States for holding double standards in their views of air defense identification zones:

- The state-run *People's Daily* argued, "The air defense identification zones of other countries were established in the name of safeguarding national security...But when China establishes its first air defense identification zone, it suddenly becomes 'unnecessarily inflammatory' in the eyes of some...The abrupt change fits into the pattern of Washington's double standards and [Tokyo is only too happy to dance to Washington's tune](#)." Zhou Yongsheng, deputy director of the Japan Study Center at China Foreign Affairs University, [echoed similar sentiments](#).
- A *Global Times* editorial took a particularly assertive stance, "If the U.S. does not go too far, we will not target it in safeguarding our air defense zone...[We should carry out timely countermeasures without hesitation against Japan](#) when it challenges China's newly declared ADIZ."
- A *China Daily* editorial stated that for the U.S. and China to "get their relationship right," "the two countries must address their conspicuous [trust deficit](#)." The U.S. reaction to China's ADIZ is only the latest reminder of how difficult it is for the two nations to overcome their distrust."
- Another *China Daily* editorial commented on Biden's visit to the region, accusing the United States of taking "Japan's side." "Our timely visitor needs to be told: it is Japan that has unilaterally changed the status quo. From its regular patrols of the Diaoyu Islands to the establishment of its new ADIZ, [China is just responding to Japanese provocations](#)."
- The *Global Times* seemed [unconcerned](#) about how the ADIZ will affect U.S.-China relations. "The strategic significance of Sino-U.S. cooperation will not be overshadowed by their

discrepancy over a certain matter."

JAPAN

Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs [expressed "deep concern"](#) that China's "profoundly dangerous acts" "unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea, escalating the situation, and that may cause unintended consequences in the East China Sea." In defiance of China's claims, Japan [allowed its major airlines](#) to fly through the disputed zone.

Media outlets and commentators in Japan overwhelmingly criticized the Chinese move:

- *The Asahi Shimbun* demanded China withdraw its "[unacceptable air defense zone](#)," which is "tantamount to a Chinese declaration that the country is willing to take military action against Japanese aircraft over the Senkaku Islands." [Nikkei Asia Review](#) voiced related ideas.
- *The Japan Times* declared the move a "[dangerous provocation](#)" targeting Japan, potentially resulting in "an unanticipated military incident" between Japanese and Chinese military aircraft. [Mainichi Shimbun](#) expressed similar concerns.
- *The Yomiuri Shimbun* felt China's "[unacceptable unilateral action](#)" drew unexpected "[international criticism](#)" further diplomatically isolating Beijing.

Media outlets offered their take on what caused China to announce the ADIZ:

- *The Japan Times* suggested "Beijing may be trying to [draw the attention](#) of the Chinese public away from domestic economic and social problems by taking a hard-line stance on the Senkaku Islands."
- *The Yomiuri Shimbun* said China's decision "[embodies its military strategy](#)" of enclosing the East China Sea and other Asian maritime areas as its zones of influence to deny access by the U.S. military."
- *Mainichi Shimbun* figured, "[Chinese forces desire a confrontation with the United States](#) on the Pacific Ocean."

Commentators suggested several actions to end the dispute:

- *The Asahi Shimbun* directed Japanese leaders to "conclude an agreement on operational rules to avoid trouble through talks between their defense authorities." This approach was echoed by [The Japan Times](#) and [The Asahi Shimbun](#).
- *The Asahi Shimbun* called on Biden to "[speak clearly](#)" to China about the U.S. objection, and *Yomiuri Shimbun* beckoned Washington and Tokyo to [reinforce their alliance](#) - along with Seoul - to build a "broad consensus" "ensuring China abides by international rules." This advice was seconded by [Yuki Tastumi](#) - the former special assistant for political affairs at the Japanese Embassy in Washington - as well as the [Mainichi Shimbun](#) and [Nikkei Asia Review](#).

SOUTH KOREA

To "[protect national interests](#)," South Korea announced plans to expand its own ADIZ to cover Socotra Rock - a disputed reef called leodo by Korea and claimed by both South Korea and China - several days after Beijing put the region in its own ADIZ. South Korea also [sent planes through the ADIZ in protest](#).

Commentators discussed the fine line South Korean officials are walking with China, as Seoul has sought to improve relations with Beijing in recent years:

- *The Korea Herald* noted South Korea had refrained from military cooperation accords with Japan and joining U.S.-led missile defense programs to "avoid provoking China." The paper felt Seoul should have "[made a more prompt and resolute response](#)" immediately after

China's ADIZ.

- *The Korea Times* held "it was [right for the government to refrain from issuing an unduly agitated response](#) to China's inclusion of leodo" in the ADIZ, but warned simply "sitting and watching changes in this region's geopolitical situation will not only narrow's the nation's diplomatic maneuvering room, but [potentially threaten its survival](#)."
- *The Chosun Ilbo* criticized what it saw as a "[feeble response to China's airspace grab](#)" when the government took "two full days to respond, and then it only summoned the Chinese military attaché in Seoul to lodge a protest," a "the low-key diplomatic approach" which will be "read as weakness and an excuse to disregard Korea's opinions and positions."

INDIA

According to the *Hindustan Times*, the Indian government has thus far [refrained from publicly commenting](#) on China's ADIZ, though it has recently engaged with "regional countries that don't see Beijing's rise as benign." As former foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh said, "India has [its own set of problem with China](#). It's better not to take positions on other countries' problems with China."

Nevertheless, several commentators decried the ADIZ as a dangerous move that could start a conflict on India's periphery:

- In an op-ed for *The Japan Times*, Brahma Chellaney, professor of Strategic Studies at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, remarked "China's growing geopolitical heft is emboldening its [territorial creep in Asia](#)," raising the "odds of armed conflict" with Japan and India and "contributing to Asian insecurity."
- [C. Raja Mohan predicted](#) that "non-aligned India will be drawn, whether it likes it or not, into the multiple realignments as Asia copes with the rise of China."
- Pramit Pal Chaudhuri from the *Hindustan Times* noted China's attempt to assuage India that "an ADIZ could not be established on the Indian border." However, Arvind Gupta, Director General of the government funded Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), [wondered how New Delhi would respond](#) "if tomorrow the Chinese declare an ADIZ over Arunachal Pradesh" along the India-China border.
- Dr. Namrata Goswami, IDSA, argued "China needs to behave like the great power it wants to be recognized as - to [raise itself above petty squabbles of the day](#)."

Some analysts blamed the United States for failing to resolve the crisis and back up its so-called pivot to Asia:

- The *Business Standard* sensed Washington showed "[weakness](#)" in advising commercial airlines to report flight plans to China, concluding the "much-publicized 'pivot' to Asia" was "little more than words."
- Mohan recognized "[frequent divergence](#)" in how the United States and its allies in Asia respond to Chinese power, such as how "Washington has asked its airlines to submit flight plans to authorities in Beijing, while Tokyo told the Japanese airlines to refuse."

Some observers debated why China chose to establish the ADIZ now:

- Rudroneel Ghosh, *The Times of India*, wrote the ADIZ came "at an [important crossroads](#)" for "new Chinese leadership" "seeking to assert itself and generate domestic support for its ambitious plans on the economic front." To dodge criticism that these reforms betray China's socialist roots, Ghosh expects "the current leadership under President Xi will increasingly play the nationalist card on territorial disputes."

Chellaney said China "[seeks to dominate the South and East China Seas](#) strategically and corner maritime resources, including seabed minerals."

- Chaudhuri saw Beijing attaching tremendous [symbolic importance](#) to the ADIZ since planes notifying China of their flight plans would "be a symbolic acceptance of some sovereign control over that airspace."

Others provided their ideas on how to resolve the conflict or how India can take advantage of the crisis:

- Instead of confrontation, Ghosh hoped China follows Taiwan's approach toward [joint-economic development](#) of the disputed region.
- In the lead up to the Japanese Emperor's recent visit to India, *The Times of India* proposed New Delhi "[persuade Tokyo to place some of its eggs in India's basket](#)" - including economic, military, and maritime cooperation - as both nations were concerned with Beijing's strategy in the region. *The Hindu*, however, countered that the "[healthy state of India-Japan relations](#) is best seen in its own terms rather than as a result of a shared wariness of China."

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